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REGARDING RECENT BOOKS AND BOOK-MAKING.

"A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES," BY OSCAR WILDE.
JAMES R. OSGOOD, MCILVAINE & CO., LONDON.

Of all men who have consented to adorn the present age, at least within the realm of that Power upon whose domain the sun never sets, none have been the recipients of adulation so profound, intermingled with opprobrium so venomous as that bestowed upon Oscar Wilde. That the philosophy for which Mr. Wilde stood, upon his advent into Letters, was, to the Philistine, a new and somewhat startling one, needs no argument; but to prove his sincerity and absoluteness of belief, in its principles, to those congregations of *Canaille* that he has addressed from time to time with his unique suavity, will undoubtedly fall to the good fortune of a future generation. Though Mr. Wilde has now for some years lain, among the data of historic literature, the famous breeches of the Clergy, as well as the flowing locks of Mediaevalism, his apostleship to the Spirit of Beauty is not yet ended. Yesterday was produced *Dorian Gray*, over whose morality two hemispheres wrangled as a nine-days-wonder. To-day is given us *A House of Pomegranates*, which Mr. Wilde has stated in print as being intended neither for the "British child" nor for the "British public." Those for whom a volume so unusual in appearance is produced, will doubtless comprehend the subtlety with which its name was chosen; a subtlety which is brought to so fine a point that, by no manner of dallying, could he who runs be enabled to read. The book is issued in square octavo, and is printed throughout on heavy, richly toned, plate paper, by the Chiswick Press. The decorations have been entrusted to Mr. Ricketts and Mr. Shannon, who have succeeded in making the volume a notable target for many who have stationed themselves outside the bastions of Materialism, to leave unmentioned the multitudes within.

A House of Pomegranates consists of four allegorical tales: the first two, "The Young King" and "The Birthday of the Infanta," may be said to represent the Sorrow of Knowledge, tales of beauty and of pity: the third, "The Fisherman and his Soul," shows the Power of Love, a story of beauty and strength; while the last, "The Star Child," in degenerating to the formula of a Teutonic fairy-tale, loses the delicacy of allegorical influence, which is felt with so much power in the others. "The Fisherman and his Soul" is the tale that will

longest be remembered, and, despite the unusual trammels which Mr. Wilde has imposed upon himself, in its *motif* the story remains a harmony of the most beautiful and fascinating simplicity. In it will be found specimens of the most forcible and picturesque prose ever given by its author. It is nowhere overloaded with that "gorgeousness of jade and amethyst" which at times satiates the reader in Mr. Wilde's previous work; spices and oriental herbage are used sparingly, and the winds from the seas of the Fisherman bring only odours of salt shores.

The young sea-toiler loses his heart to a mermaid, who will not accept it while he possesses the human soul. Both Priest and Merchant scorn his desire to part with this thing which as he laments, "I cannot see it, I may not touch it, I do not know it." A young witch, however, rids him of his encumbrance, but she sends it forth without a heart. It wanders to the east and to the south, and gains knowledge and riches unknown to man, which, on returning to its master, are offered in exchange for its old habitation; but to the Fisherman his love is greater than wealth or wisdom. A third time the Soul returns, and this time with the world's pleasures; the temptation is great. What matters it? says the Fisherman to his heart. I can come back to my love: and so to see the dancing feet of an Arab girl the briny home of the Titans is deserted. The Soul leads its master through sin and crime because it has been forced to wander without a Heart; and finally, overwhelmed at the blackness of his own Soul, the Fisherman returns to the shore of his love, where "every morning he called to the mermaid, and every noon he called to her again, and at night time he spake her name," but she never came in answer to his call. The Soul mocked him, but he continued in his supplication, until one day the black waters arose in a storm, and brought his beloved to his feet, quite dead. The Fisherman clasped the cold form in his arms, and, his heart breaking, the angry sea lapped them both 'round. The proud anathemas of the priest were theirs, and the far corner of the Fuller's field their unmarked grave. On the anniversary of their death the prelate was to address his hearers upon the wrath of God. Arrayed in pontifical robes and exhibiting the monstrance, the odour of the white flowers on the altar troubled him, and to himself all unknown he spoke long and eloquently of God's Love. Upon inquiry, after the service, he found the strange flowers had been gathered from the far corner of the Fuller's field.

FRED HOLLAND DAY.